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EDITORIAL NOTES

NOTES FROM THE MEETING OF THE NORTHERN ILLINOIS TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION[1]

If the general trend of thought displayed at the recent meeting of the Northern Illinois Teachers' Association is any index of progress in teaching in the section of country there represented, we have reason for great encouragement. The topic was, "Nature-Study and Geography." Both the prepared addresses and the discussions showed a strong movement in the direction of real experience as the basis of all work from primary grades through the high school. Not only this, the speakers who took part in the discussions, almost without exception, urged the organization of geography and nature-study from the human standpoint, and about a large and rich organizing center. The "choppiness" of the old teaching of geography came up for the strongest kind of denunciation. The necessity was emphasized of so enlisting the pupil's interest that problems would arise out of his own desire for meaning and relation.

In the discussion of Mr. Otis Caldwell's paper on "Criteria for the Selection of Material in Geography and Nature-Study," Mr. Charles A. McMurry called attention to the unity from the first to about the fourth school year in subject-matter of nature-study and geography and then said that in discussions too often the general principles of teaching a subject would be laid down and the detail of selection would be left untouched. He said that we must go on from criteria of selection to selection of materials in a course of study; must not be afraid to risk our principles, but proceed to the detail of topics, and the treatment of topics throughout a progressive course. He said that the problem for all teachers was now a practical one, namely, "What is the outcome of theory?" He gave as his solution the conviction that for each school year the work in nature-study and geography should cluster about a few large topics, saying,

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[1] Meetings held at the University of Chicago, November 1 and 2, 1907.

> The best topics in any study are those that the study in itself is not big enough to hold; children can be most sincerely interested in a big comprehensive subject.

He suggested the topics, "The Farm," "Forest," and "Garden," as offering a combination of manual work and scientific and practical study. The coal industry was given as an example of a study that could be made far reaching in its ramifications, if studied as an organic thing; the transportation, machinery for blasting, hoisting, and weighing, the geography of coal-producing areas, the origin of coal, and the force of the coal industry in determining the whole question of manufacture in this country; the conditions under which the miners live, economic relations. All these gave to the topic great richness. The following quotations give the trend of Dr. McMurry's further discussion:

> Any topic worth studying at all is worth studying in three or four different subjects. . . . . If education concentrates, we must pick out our topics not so much with relation to the logic of particular subjects, as with the view of illuminating these large relationships; and any teacher who is not big enough to deal with such a topic in its varied relationships is not big enough to deal solely with any one subject.
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> The great world is *one,* not two or twenty; this conception is not the only determining one in the selection necessary for forming a course of study, but it is a great one.
>
> The increasing complexity of modern life is responsible for a complexity of studies in their interrelations; the course of study must throw light on these different and complicated social forces; history must show the development of man's institutions; natural science throw light on the application of the great inventions that have revolutionized industry, and art must bear an ever closer relation to modern industrial life.
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> The content studies all converge at one point, namely, in modern life, and topics must be selected from that point of view.
>
> A growing and developing idea is what children need; every great topic is capable of upward development.
>
> ### CRITERIA FOR ALL DETERMINATION IN THE COURSE OF STUDY
>
> 1. Large topics, reaching out in all directions, into other studies.
> 2. Topics found in types. Types are concrete problems, realities, but may contain in their development far-reaching generalizations. Illustration: In the study of one great commercial city we have the type of all.

The discussion of the grammar grade and high-school section in the afternoon centered about the paper: "An Outline for a

Course of Study in Nature-Study and Geography for the Period of Adolescence," by Miss Zonia Baber. Both the paper itself and the discussion which followed it showed the same prevailing tendencies as were evidenced in the earlier session. In the absence of Miss Baber, Mr. Wallace Atwood gave a brief analysis of the main points in her paper:

1. Adolescence is a period of enlargement of interests, of adjustment to a larger world. Study should be extensive rather than intensive; should cover a wide range.
2. Problems should arise from the industrial or practical side of school work, and schools should be so organized that these problems would appear naturally.
3. The work in these subjects, as in all others, should tend toward greater social efficiency in the pupils.
4. Reasons for the decrease in numbers electing science work in the high schools.
5. Necessity for fieldwork.

Mr. Atwood said in conclusion that the paper was written on a broad philosophic basis, from the general motive of the establishment of controlling principles.

Mr. John Tear opened the discussion with an expression of harmony with the general point of view of Miss Baber's outline. He confined his attention to points one and two of Mr. Atwood's analysis. He agreed entirely with the idea of approaching problems from the human standpoint and said:

> The school should be an organization for activity and should organize interests. The child should have as vital an interest in the processes engaged in at school as the man has in his business. In such a school only, can social efficiency be developed.
>
> I should not quite agree with the statement that work should be extensive rather than intensive; I think it can be both extensive and intensive to great advantage. The medium of the "type-study" gives this possibility. The type-study is so far reaching in so many lines that it gives the quality of extensiveness, while being intensive; in method it is extensive in being interpretative of similar conditions or places. Take, for example, a study of the wheat industry in the fifth grade; the interest becomes immediate and vital while the implications geographically, industrially, and scientifically are very broad.
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> In answer to the question, Why is science decreasing in popularity as a chosen subject in high school? I would say that considering geography "as

she is taught," very few grammar-grade children would elect it if it were made optional; since no election is allowed there, all take it. Nor should the high school be allowed to elect.

The notion that science is a body of truth, fixed, absolute, and eternal; and the maintenance of a corresponding attitude on the part of the teacher is responsible for a great measure of the lack of interest in geography and science in high schools. If geography is taken up from the industrial side in the fifth grade and is carried out on the same fundamental lines in later grades, the children will begin to be ready by the seventh grade, or certainly by the eighth, for geography *per se*. In the ninth grade geography might be treated somewhat from the logical development of the subject, in the form of physiography, or physical geography. The more abstract sciences would follow.

In the eighth grade the child begins to become conscious of need for some systematic study. He will not get much out of systematic study until he comes to it with a great deal of knowledge, a great number of facts that have come to him vitally and that are crying out for reorganization. For example, the study of physics should come when he has had much experience in an informal way with the phenomena falling under that head and begins to feel the need of their relation to a larger whole.

Another aspect of the centralization of subjects was brought out in the discussion of the paper by Miss Marian Weller on "The Principles of Presentation of Geographic Material," namely the importance of presenting material in such form to children that they would grasp the causal relations existing between phenomena.

Miss Weller's thesis was as follows:

In the "old" geography, place and location formed the content of the subject-matter, and facts appeared wholly isolated and unrelated. This "new" geography of ours presents a striking contrast, in looking at the subject from a distinctly human view-point; in recognizing man as the unifying element.

Those principles, therefore, which, according to our modern ideas, should underlie and control the presentation of geographic material in the elementary school, may be stated in a general way, as follows:

1. The human element should be most prominent. Man in his social and industrial environment is the central figure, and therefore geography should be presented from the human point of view.

2. Causal connections and relationships should be looked for at each step, and there should be a constant relating of man to his environment through his own needs, so making geography in its broadest sense a "study of the earth in its relation to life."

3. A first-hand knowledge of geographic facts and conditions at home

is essential in order to have a basis for the understanding of those conditions which are far reaching in their effect upon peoples.

4. Concreteness of material and illustrations should be aimed at.

In the discussion of this paper Dr. Herman Lukens said that he would add to the fourth point the idea of concreteness not merely for the purpose of having a graphic presentation but because concrete material embodies causal relation. He believed the course of study should be organized to this purpose—to bring out causal relation. Dr. Lukens thought the usual study of geography was too fragmentary, that mere skeletons of life were taken up for study, not real, live, active conditions, he said:

> Material must be made over, and organized, to be sure that the causal relations are brought out, like the dramatist, the teacher, must choose elements artistically; the presentation must be of real life, but done as a work of art.

Dr. Lukens cited the type-studies of Dr. Charles A. McMurry as an example of concrete topics involving the presentation of material about some great situation until it becomes clear in its causal relations. He gave as an example the study of Niagara Falls and the great lakes extending over several weeks, covering the geology, history, manufactures, utilization of water power, great cities and reasons for their growth; afterward touching lightly on one or two other lakes and lake systems for comparison. He said that these causal relations must not be stated but must be thought out by the children, and to give them geographies that do state relations explicitly is to defeat one's purpose, which should be to have the work of discovery and organization done by the children. In speaking of contact with realities he said:

> No arm-chair philosopher could have discovered the causal relation between the earthworms and the soil; the discovery was the result of observations made *on the ground.*

B. P.